Focus Group Brief

Participants

- **46 teachers participated in focus groups**
- **EL teachers were not as well represented as other types of teachers:**
  - general education 43% (n=20); special education 37% (n=17); English learner 20% (n=9)
- **School locations differed:**
  - Rural 41% (n=19); suburban 30% (n=14); urban 26% (n=12); county 2% (n=1)
- **Elementary teachers were most likely to participate:**
  - Elementary 63% (n=29); elementary-middle 7% (n=3); middle 9% (n=4); middle-high 7% (n=3); high 15% (n=7)

Results

Decision-Making Process

- The three teacher groups gave similar answers regarding:
  - Use of accessibility features and accommodations for assessments more often than for in-class activities.
  - How decisions were made by the individuals were involved in determining accessibility features and accommodations for students.
  - The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team as the group mediating the decision-making process for students with disabilities. They tended to list similar types of IEP team participants.
  - The use of the term "accommodations" (primarily for students with disabilities) instead of "accessibility features."

- The three teacher groups differed in terms of:
  - Types of teams deciding accessibility features and accommodations use (e.g., pre-referral teams, RTI teams, general teacher teams). EL teachers were the least likely to mention a team-based approach.
  - Naming educators participating on general education teams (e.g., special education teachers, intervention specialists, etc.).

- Standardized assessment accommodations for K-2 students were not relevant. Class accommodations and assessments were discussed at times.

- Other decision-making topics mentioned:
  - Not included in IEP team decision making (general education)
  - General education teachers' input not always included (special education)
  - EL and special education teachers were the primary/sole decision makers (EL, special education)
  - Decisions made informally between teachers rather than at scheduled team meetings (general education)
  - External entities (e.g., county leadership, SAT College Board) decided accommodations rather than teachers (special education)
  - No criteria available to make decisions for ELs (EL)
  - Parent and student input valued for high school students (special education)
  - General education and EL students were not allowed accommodations on state content tests (EL, general education)
  - Accommodations used on one test were not available on other types of tests (e.g., district, formative, interim practice) (general education, special education)
  - The need for individualized decision making (special education primarily, some general education)

Types of Data Used for Decision-Making

- All three groups of teachers used similar forms of data (e.g., test scores, observations, grades, classwork) to decide accessibility features and accommodations

- Other data used (by group):
  - English language proficiency level (EL)
  - Years in U.S. school (EL)
  - Disability status (special education)
  - Parent and student input (special education)
  - Database tracking progress, especially in test scores (general education)

- Data on students with disabilities was available only in IEP (general education)

Constraints

- Common constraints included:
  - A lack of teacher knowledge and understanding about accessibility features and accommodations, which students can have them, who should make the decisions, and how to make decisions
  - Issues with computer-based assessments, (e.g., limited access to computers, familiarity with technology, embedded design restricted individualization, limited flexibility to maneuver the controls, poor computer voice quality for text-to-speech)
  - The limited amount of accessibility features and accommodations available
  - Distracting or inadequate (e.g., for students with intellectual disabilities) accessibility features and accommodations that were not helpful

- o Staff shortage to implement accessibility features and accommodations

- Other constraints mentioned (by group):
    - o Insufficient practice time with online tests (general education, EL)
    - o Insufficient time and a shortage of space to provide accessibility features and accommodations to all students (general education, special education).
    - o Difficulty developing and implementing class accommodations (general education)
    - o Not enough math accommodations (general education)
    - o Lack of resource rooms to provide accessibility features and accommodations, (e.g., reader), especially for students with moderate to severe disabilities. (special education)
    - o Accommodations were not available on all tests other than state summative test (special education)